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SUBJECT: JEDDAH BUSINESS COMMUNITY COMES OUT IN FORCE TO
HONOR OUSTED CHAIRMAN

REF: JEDDAH 0050

Classified By: Consul General Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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¶1. (U) Summary. The Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) hosted a major reception on April 7 at the Jeddah Expo Center to bid farewell to Saleh Al Turki, the recently ousted Chairman of the JCCI and the President of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (reftel), and to welcome Mohamed Al Fadl, his replacement in both positions. CG, Pol/EconOff and CommOff attended. This was the first-ever event of its kind acknowledging an outgoing Chairman on such a large scale. The governors of Makkah and Jeddah, Prince Khaled Al Faisal and Prince Mishal bin Majid, respectively, attended as did the King's daughter, Princess Seeta. The event itself constituted a major show of support by the Jeddawi business community for the former Chairman who was removed by the Minister of Commerce outside the democratic process. The supportive applause each time Al Turki's name was mentioned, especially from the women's section, repeatedly demonstrated the affection felt for Al Turki in this town. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Who's Who of the Jeddah business community came out in force to honor Saleh Al Turki who was ousted from the Chairmanship of the JCCI without warning on January 31. The reception was proposed and organized by the businesswomen of the Chamber. Ghada Ghazzawi, who credited Al Turki's support as the reason for the success of her event planning business, managed the high-powered hail and farewell. Al Turki was a major force in the expansion of rights for Saudi businesswomen, who worry that his ouster may result in a setback for their movement. Their affection for him is demonstrable. Indeed, when Al Turki pointedly thanked the women of the Chamber for their dedication and support, there was hearty applause in the (gender-segregated) women's section of the auditorium though many of the men sat in silence.

¶3. (C) Both Al Fadl and Al Turki addressed the audience after introductory remarks by Hussein Abu Dawood on behalf of industry and Mohamed Wajeed Sharbatly on behalf of commerce. Al Turki thanked Prince Khaled publicly for the values he has promoted in the Makkah region. The irony was undoubtedly not lost on many in the audience since reportedly Khaled's style and values clashed with Al Turki's pragmatic methods of getting things done (reftel). This conflict ultimately made it impossible for Khaled to provide the same high-level cover that Khaled's predecessor, the late Prince Abdelmajid, used to shield the dynamic Al Turki -- thus leaving him vulnerable to attack and eventually to dismissal from above.

¶4. (U) Al Turki, who remains a JCCI Board member as well as a leading businessman, listed some of the successes of his tenure including the expansion of the Chamber from a house of commerce solely to a house of business, social, cultural and community service. He noted that on his watch the JCCI developed a number of public/private partnerships with, among

others, the Governorate (Emara), King Abdelaziz University, the Ministries of Education, Justice, and Labor, the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, the Supreme Commission for Tourism, and the Jeddah Municipality. He added that during his three years as Chairman the JCCI's income increased from SAR 63 million to SAR 140 million per year and that 63 active committees have been established.

15. (C) Comment: The mere fact of the event was as much a political statement -- if not a slap in the face -- to the external forces, emanating from the King on down, who saw fit to take that which wasn't broken -- a dynamic, democratic and successful Chamber -- and fix it. Al Turki's leadership is missed and the Chamber is essentially muddling through until the election of a new Board this fall. That Al Turki was so publicly lauded -- including by his successor (and close friend) -- proved that the Jeddah (Hejazi) business community is, on occasion, willing to stand up for its own in respectful defiance of royal authority. That Al Turki so graciously appeared and used the opportunity to thank and praise the royal family brought the public drama some degree of official closure. End Comment.

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